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Historiography in Transit: Survivor Historians and the Writing of Holocaust History in the late 1940s

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INTRODUCTION

"The blood of our martyrs, our relatives, is still fresh. It screams to us and calls upon us not to forget!" the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Łodz exhorted the 100,000-150,000 Holocaust survivors still in Poland in October 1946. Whether they had "spent the German occupation in ghettos, camps, on the Aryan side, hidden in the woods, [or] fighting in partisan units", every surviving Jewish woman or man should provide the Historical Commission with a full account of their personal experiences during these years. As "precious material on our bloody history", these accounts needed to be "carefully collected and immortalised". The Commission also sought "pictures, documents, community registers, diaries and other items[. . .]. *This is a duty for every single individual*. We hope that everyone will understand the importance of this and will fulfil this duty towards the Jewish past".[1]

The Central Jewish Historical Commission originated in Lublin in August 1944, just weeks after the city's liberation, when a small group of survivors gathered to chronicle and research the genocide of three million Polish Jews—ninety per cent of the pre-war Jewish population of Poland. The mere fact of their survival, the activists believed, made bearing witness, documenting, and researching the catastrophe a moral imperative and an obligation towards those who had been murdered and the generations to come. This urge to document, witness and testify was not confined to survivors in Poland. Immediately after their liberation from National-Socialist rule and with the end of warfare, Jews in fourteen countries established historical commissions, documentation centres and projects for the purpose of researching the recent annihilation of European Jews—the *khurbn*, *kataklyzm*, or *umkum* in the Yiddish terminology common at the time.[2] These Jewish

[1] 'Zkhor et asher asa lekha Amalek!' (30 October 1946), Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Central Jewish Historical Commission Collection (hereafter ŻIH/CKŻP/KH), folder 28, p. 17, Yiddish, emphasis in original.

[2] These countries included Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Great Britain, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and the Soviet Union. For an overview of these initiatives, see Philip Friedman, 'The European Jewish Research on the Recent Jewish Catastrophe in 1939–1945', in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 28 (1949), pp. 179–211.

documentation efforts emerged as a grassroots movement created by a diverse group of survivors, dissimilar in their education, nationalities, and class status, as well as in their wartime experiences. By and large untrained in the historical profession, these activists were lawyers, accountants, teachers, writers, journalists, engineers, artists, medical doctors, manual labourers and homemakers who felt obliged to document the past.

The Jewish historical commissions and documentation centres systematically recorded the catastrophe by collecting thousands of National-Socialist documents and photographs, memoirs, diaries, songs and poems written by Jews during and after the war, along with objects and artefacts. In the first postwar decade they published numerous research instructions and questionnaires, source editions, local and regional studies of ghettos and camps, memoirs, diaries and historical periodicals. They pioneered in developing a Holocaust historiography which used both victim and perpetrator sources to document the everyday life and death of European Jews under National-Socialist occupation, while placing the experiences of Jews at the centre. Until the end of the 1950s these Jewish documentation initiatives gathered some 18,000 testimonies and 8,000 questionnaires completed by survivors.[3]

Historians have long overlooked these early postwar Jewish initiatives to write the history of the Holocaust. They commonly located the beginnings of systematic Holocaust research and historiography in the early 1960s and assumed that survivors had long remained silent about this chapter in their lives. Raul Hilberg noted an upsurge in testimonial activity among survivors in the late 1940s, but he, as other historians, attributed no greater significance to the fact that in the immediate wake of their liberation from National-Socialist rule survivors undertook substantial efforts to write the history of the Holocaust.[4] In recent years, however, the immediate post war Jewish responses to the Holocaust have moved to the centre of scholarly attention, and historians have come to question the stereotypical idea of silence on the part of both survivors and the wider Jewish public in the wake of the event. Revealing a wide range of ways in which Jews talked, wrote and published about the Holocaust already in the first fifteen years after the war, some historians, such as Hasia R. Diner, David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, even speak of that postwar silence as a myth.[5] Recent scholarship has presented survivors as a diverse group with dissimilar wartime experiences, national backgrounds and ideological outlooks, however they all exhibited agency in rebuilding their lives and

[3] See Raul Hilberg, 'I Was Not There', in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, New York 1988, pp. 7–25, here 18. For a testimony to the prolific publication activity of the first postwar decade and a half see the following bibliography: Philip Friedman and Jacob Robinson (eds.), *Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact*, New York 1960.

[4] See, for example, Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, Hanover, NH 1987, p. 4; Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (eds.), *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, Chicago/London 2003, p. 3. See also Raul Hilberg, *Sources of Holocaust Research: An Analysis*, Chicago 2001, p. 47.

[5] Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962*, New York 2009; David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (eds.), *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, New York 2012; and François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les français et la mémoire*, Paris 2012.

shaping their future.[6] Far from mute after their liberation from National-Socialist rule, they actively confronted their past by writing, testifying and commemorating.[7]

This essay is an opportunity to look at the production and migration of knowledge about the Holocaust which Jewish survivors "produced" outside the academy and to think about how methods of historical research developed under extraordinary circumstances in the aftermath of the Second World War. Polish Jews were particularly active among the survivors who dedicated themselves to post-liberation Holocaust documentation and historiography. The impact of violent antisemitism and mounting political pressure from the new communist regime led a number of protagonists of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Łodz to migrate to Western Europe, the United States and Israel, where they continued their research and encouraged other survivors to follow suit. In tracing their paths of migration from Poland, I will seek to answer the following questions: Why and under what circumstances did survivors commit themselves to the difficult task of registering their knowledge of the traumatic events they had so recently witnessed? What methods did they develop to research the Jewish catastrophe? What effect did the process of relocation from Poland to Western Europe and eventually overseas have on their historical work? How was this kind of specific knowledge received both within and beyond academia, and what was the impact of these early post war Jewish documentation initiatives on Holocaust historiography more generally?

RECOVERED ROOTS: DOCUMENTING THE HOLOCAUST IN LIBERATED POLAND

On August 29, 1944, five weeks after the Red Army liberated Lublin which then became the temporary capital of Soviet-controlled Polish territory, a handful of survivors founded a historical commission to document the destruction of Polish Jewry. In order "to get exact knowledge of what the Jewish cataclysm looked like", the activists, none of them trained historians, gathered sources "from an

[6] See, for example, Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, Princeton 2007 (hereafter Grossmann, *Jews*); Margarete Meyers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957*, New York 2010; and Avinoam J. Patt and Michael Berkowitz (eds.), "*We are Here*": *New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, Detroit 2010.

[7] In recent years historians have begun to study the various Jewish documentation projects in a number of European countries. See Natalia Aleksiun, 'The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, 1944–1947', in Gabriel N. Finder *et al.* (eds.), "Making Holocaust Memory" (special issue) *Polin*, vol. 20 (2008), pp. 74–97 and Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, New York 1997, chap. 3; see also the essays by Rita Horváth on Hungary, Georges Bensoussan on France, Iael Nidam-Orvieto on Italy, Feliks Tych on Poland and Ada Schein on Germany in David Bankier and Dan Michman (eds.), *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, Jerusalem 2008. The only study which has taken a comparative approach to a number of European Jewish historical commissions and documentation centres so far is: Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, New York 2012. Similarly, Boaz Cohen analyzed the European initiatives as precursors for Israeli Holocaust research in his *Israeli Holocaust Research: Birth and Evolution*, London 2013.

exclusively Jewish point of view",[8] mainly eyewitness testimony from survivors in and around Lublin. Three months later, the Central Committee of Polish Jews—a newly founded body representing the roughly 280,000 Jews who then constituted the remnant of Polish Jewry—invited Philip Friedman to reorganise and direct the Commission.[9] Hopes of reviving pre-war traditions of Polish-Jewish historiography may have informed this decision, as may the wish to entrust this onerous and significant task of researching the recent tragedy to the hands of someone who was both a survivor and a professional historian. Friedman had studied at the Viennese Jewish Teachers' Seminary under Salo W. Baron and held a doctorate in history from the University of Vienna. Before the German occupation of Poland, Friedman had worked as a high school teacher in Łodz and had lectured on the social, economic and political history of nineteenth-century Polish Jewry at Warsaw University. While the Germans murdered his entire family, Friedman managed to survive in hiding in his native Lvov. In November 1944 he participated in the repatriation of Polish citizens from formerly Polish, now Ukrainian, areas and settled in Lublin.[10] At the end of December, he founded the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, CŻKH) under the auspices of the Central Committee, which provided for the Commission's financial expenses by allocating a portion of the funds it received from the Polish government and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). With Poland's liberation complete, in March 1945 the Commission transferred its headquarters to Łodz and established a country-wide network of twenty-five sub-commissions with around a hundred paid employees in addition to an even larger number of volunteers.[11]

Friedman's closest collaborators included three Warsaw University-trained historians, Dr. Joseph Kermisz, Isaiah Trunk and Artur Eisenbach, and Friedman's second wife Ada Eber, who held a doctorate in history from the University of Lvov. While Kermisz and Eber had survived the war in hiding in eastern Poland, Trunk and Eisenbach had escaped to the Soviet Union and returned to Poland in summer 1946. Other co-workers were literary scholars, such as Dr. Nella Rost and Nachman Blumental, both of whom survived in hiding, and Michał Borwicz, who fought as commander of a Jewish partisan unit after escaping from the Janowska camp in Lvov. Among those with less academic backgrounds, Rachel Auerbach was a journalist before the war. Recruited by Emanuel Ringelblum for his secret

[8] 'Protokol,' AŻIH/CŻKH/303/XX, folder 10, 29 August–5 November 1944, pp. 1–29, here 23 September 1944, p. 12, Yiddish.

[9] On these numbers, see David Engel, 'Poland Since 1939', in Gershon D. Hundert (ed.), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, New Haven 2008, vol. 2, p. 1407; Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust: A Portrait based on Jewish Community Records, 1944–1947*, Armonk, NY 1994, p. 25.

[10] On Friedman, see Roni Stauber, *Laying the Foundations for Holocaust Research: The Impact of the Historian Philip Friedman*, Jerusalem 2009; Natalia Aleksiun, "Philip Friedman and the Emergence of Holocaust Scholarship: A Reappraisal," in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, vol. 11 (2012), pp. 333–346.

[11] See Philip Friedman's report at a conference of the World Jewish Congress in London, 22 August 1945, American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, World Jewish Congress Collection (hereafter AJA/WJC), A 92/1.

Oyneg Shabbes archives, she contributed a study on the fight against hunger in the Warsaw Ghetto and recorded the testimony of a Treblinka escapee in September 1942. After fleeing the Ghetto the following spring, she survived under a false identity. Friedman's staff included a second close affiliate of Ringelblum: Hersz Wasser, a Warsaw University-trained lawyer who had survived outside the Ghetto. Other co-workers included teachers Noe Grüss, Genia Silkes and Mejlech Bakalczuk, as well as Joseph Wulf, who had received a religious Jewish education at the Mir Yeshiva.[12]

These women and men acted out of a number of overlapping motivations. Many followed the injunction that survivors must bear witness for the sake of the dead as well as for future generations. Documentation not only provided a way to mourn and commemorate the dead, but by collecting and recording traces of the lives and suffering of those who had been murdered, survivors created "substitute gravestones"[13] for those whose burial places remained unidentified. Thus CŻKH members understood their documentation project as a "memorial to millions of dead, which shall be a lighthouse for future generations".[14] By enabling survivors to "work through" the past and understand the meaning of their own survival, historical documentation also helped achieve a kind of post-traumatic normalisation.[15] The meticulous exposure of the daunting historical truth about the German murder of Polish Jews provided Commission workers with a sense that "no tear, no drop of blood [was] spilled in vain," and that they had survived in order to fulfil "the task with which history has entrusted us".[16] Moreover, such practical reasons as preparing the ground for historical research, regaining despoiled property and making claims for material redress, bringing perpetrators to justice, and inscribing the Jewish catastrophe in humankind's historical consciousness also played vital roles.

Missions and Methods

The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Łodz embarked on a threefold mission: first, with the help of dozens of voluntary collectors (Yiddish *zamlers*)

[12] For biographies of these individuals, see Shmuel Niger and Jacob Shatski (eds.), *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, New York 1956–1981, vol. 1, pp. 245–246, vol. 3, pp. 276–277, vol. 7, pp. 486–489, vol. 8, pp. 237–238; Melech Ravitch, *Meyn leksikon*, Montreal 1958, pp. 44–45; and Nella Rost, 'Verfolgungsvorgang', Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland in Heidelberg B.2/1, Zg. 00/03, no. 73.

[13] Daniel Boyarin and Jack Kugelmass used this term to refer to memorial books, collective acts of writing edited by Holocaust survivors to commemorate their destroyed communities. See Kugelmass and Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, Bloomington 1998, p. 34.

[14] Noe Grüss, *Rok pracy Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej*, Łodz 1946, p. 10.

[15] The psychoanalytic term 'working through' is used here, following Dominick LaCapra, as an analytical process in which a traumatised individual gains a critical distance to traumatic events in the past and is able to distinguish between then and now without avoidance, harmonisation, forgetting or submergence. See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore–London 2001, pp. 143–145.

[16] CŻKH to the Union of Jewish Writers, Artists, and Scholars in New York, 24 April 1945, AŻIH/CKŻP/KH, folder 118, pp. 2–3, Yiddish.

loosely affiliated with the Commission, it sought to create an archival repository "illuminating the German murder campaign committed against the Jews in Poland".[17] The compilation of documentary evidence was crucial because, in the words of Philip Friedman, "history can be distorted and it may be possible for the younger generation in Europe to establish a myth that the Germans were not the cause of the Jewish tragedy." By establishing a Holocaust archive the commission activists endeavoured "to frustrate any attempts to create such a myth".[18] The CŻKH's primary holdings included administrative sources that the Germans had left behind in fleeing from Soviet advances, in addition to a broad variety of Jewish sources from ghettos and camps.

Second, the Commission chronicled the experiences and responses of the Jewish population to National-Socialist persecution, in particular by collecting survivor testimony. Friedman and his colleagues were convinced that perpetrator sources alone did not provide a suitable basis for writing the history of the Holocaust. The loopholes in the paper trail of German crimes and the National-Socialists' intentional use of a "camouflaging jargon,"[19] meant that German documents must be contextualised with Jewish sources if they were to adequately reflect the experiences of the Jewish victims. Yet the National Socialist's efforts to perpetrate a crime without evidence or witnesses had ensured that sources related to the victims' experiences were in short supply. Thus the activists in Łodz recognised that they must draw from survivors' memories, in the form of testimony and other kinds of survivor accounts.[20]

As guidelines for gathering victim sources, in summer 1945 the Commission published three complex questionnaires in Polish and Yiddish. The first, aimed as a directive for conducting interviews with adults, covered a great variety of wartime experiences, among them ghettos, labour, concentration and extermination camps, bunkers, hiding places, and life in partisan units and under false identity. In addition to physical persecution it covered the socioeconomic, cultural and political effects of National-Socialist occupation on Jewish society and its impact on cultural and religious practices, as well as on relations between Jews and non-Jews. Designed as an instrument to measure and monitor the dramatic transformations of Jewish life in the face of persecution and mass murder, the questionnaire solicited accounts from women and men with diverse social and educational backgrounds and ideological points of view.[21] A second questionnaire

[17] 'Vegen der Tsentraler Yidisher Historisher Komisye', in *YPO Bulletin*, vol. 6, no. 16 (19 January 1945), AŻIH/CKŻP/KH, folder 1, p. 178.

[18] Philip Friedman's report, 22 August 1945, AJA/WJC, A 92/1, English in original.

[19] Philip Friedman, 'Die Probleme der wissenschaftlichen Erforschung unserer letzten Katastrophe', Archives of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris (hereafter ACDJC), box 13, pp. 8–9.

[20] See Michał Borwicz, 'Les tâches de la nouvelle historiographie juive' in CDJC (ed.), *Les Juifs en Europe (1939–1945): Rapports présentés à la première conférence européenne des commissions historiques et des centres de documentation juifs*, Paris 1949, pp. 93–96; and Philip Friedman, 'Les problèmes de recherche scientifique sur notre dernière catastrophe', in *ibid.*, pp. 72–80.

[21] Josef Kermisz (ed.), *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów historycznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej*, Łodz 1945.

instructed teachers, social workers and foster parents on interviewing child survivors up to the age of sixteen about survival in ghettos and camps, in hiding, under a false identity and with the help of (non-Jewish) caretakers. Commission workers' interest in the experiences of Jewish children under the National-Socialist regime may in part have resulted from their attempts to cope with the loss of their own children; yet beyond any personal psychological concerns, they believed child survivors to be less pre-possessed and judgmental than adults and therefore deemed their accounts a more 'objective' historical source. Moreover, in their view, the innocence and vulnerability of children made them a powerful symbol of European Jews' overall victimization whereas their youthfulness embodied the Jewish future.[22] The third questionnaire advised collectors of "ethnographic materials" on how to transcribe popular literary creations, songs, poems, and stories, as important sources for understanding the victims' cultural responses to persecution. Authored by Nachman Blumental, the questionnaire also inquired into the development of a distinct ghetto and camp language, which would help posterity to fully understand survivor accounts. It reveals a prescient understanding of language and popular culture as vital tools for studying the transformations of ideas, social norms, and cultural and religious practices under the impact of genocide.[23]

The skills of individual interviewers determined how closely the Commission's instructions were followed. In order to avoid factual mistakes, the Commission often paired interviewers and interviewees from the same towns or regions. Testimonies were first handwritten by the witnesses themselves or by the interviewers, who then also prepared a typed transcript. Both documents were signed by interviewee and interviewer. The Commission's guidelines encouraged *zamlers* to pose direct questions to those survivors who had difficulty in relating their experiences and whose accounts lacked detail. However, they were to refrain from interfering if witnesses were eloquent and related an abundance of detail on their own. Although CŻKH prohibited *zamlers* from altering or manipulating testimonies, we cannot be sure of the actual dynamics between interviewer and interviewee or to what degree interviewers influenced the witnesses.[24] Evidently, large numbers of survivors reported to commission offices to testify of their own volition; yet CŻKH workers also visited community centres, hospitals, orphanages, and private homes to collect testimonies. Aware that it had no other power at its command than moral pressure, the Commission used posters and public appeals, such as the one cited at the opening of this essay, to motivate the Jewish public to testify and provide the Commission with other kinds of documents

[22] Noe Grüss and Genia Silkes (eds.), *Instrukcje dla badania przeżyć dzieci żydowskich w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, Łodz 1945.
[23] Nachman Blumental (ed.), *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, Łodz 1945.
[24] See, CŻKH (ed.), *Metodologishe onveyzungen tsum oysforshn dem khurbn fun poylishn yidntum*, Łodz 1945, pp. 2–4.

from the recent past.[25] When the Commission was dissolved in the fall of 1947, it had collected over 3,000 survivor testimonies and several thousand pages of National-Socialist documents, along with diaries, memoirs, Jewish folklore, artefacts and photographs.[26]

CŻKH's third mission was the publication of various kinds of historical works.[27] To educate gentile Poles about the fate of their Jewish neighbours and to register the catastrophe in Jewish historiography, it engaged in a multifaceted publication programme that over three years brought out thirty-nine monographs, mostly in Polish and largely financed by the AJDC. These included eleven local studies of ghettos and camps, largely authored by Commission employees[28]; six memoirs, including a book featuring the testimonies of child survivors from the CŻKH's collection[29]; five volumes of annotated National-Socialist documents relating to the fate of Polish Jews under German occupation[30]; four methodological works with questionnaires and research guidelines; three volumes of poetic and literary renditions of the persecution experience written during and after the war and a dictionary of ghetto and camp language.[31] These works provided a 'bottom up' perspective on the Jewish cataclysm in Poland. Through the prisms of individual accounts and local studies based on both victim and perpetrator sources, they provided insights into the social, economic and cultural history of Jewish daily life and death under National-Socialist occupation. While these works seem to have been well received among Jews in Poland and in the Polish-Jewish Diaspora in Europe, Palestine/Israel and the Americas, they were largely ignored outside these circles. Indeed, it took several decades before they made their way into the works of academic Holocaust historiography in Europe and the United States.[32]

[25] "Tsu ale yidn in Poyln!," n. d., AŻIH/CŻKH/303/XX, folder 406, pp. 23–24.

[26] See Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, *Holocaust Survivors Testimony Catalogue*, Warsaw 1998–2009, vol. 3.

[27] 'Vegen der Tsentraler Yidisher Historisher Komisye' in *YPO Bulletin* vol. 6, no. 16 (19 January 1945), AŻIH/CKŻP/KH, folder 1, p. 178.

[28] They include Friedman's works on Lvov and Auschwitz-Birkenau and Rachel Auerbach's study on Treblinka. See Philip Friedman, *To jest Oświęcim!*, Warsaw 1945, translated as *This was Oswiecim: The story of a murder camp*, London: 1946; and Rachel Auerbach, *Oyf di felder fun Treblinke: Reportazsh*, Warsaw 1947.

[29] Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss (eds.), *Dzieci oskarżają*, Krakow 1947, translated as *The Children Accuse*, London–Portland 1996.

[30] Three of these works, published together as *Dokumenty i materiały do dziejów okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*, include vol. I on the camps, ed. by Nachman Blumental, *Obozy*, Łodz 1946; vol. II on *Aktionen* and deportations, ed. by Joseph Kermisz, *Akcje i wysiedlenia*, Warsaw 1946; and vol. III on the Łodz ghetto, ed. by Artur Eisenbach, *Ghetto łódzkie*, Krakow–Łodz–Warsaw 1946).

[31] Nachman Blumental, *Słowa niewinne*, Krakow 1947.

[32] For example Raul Hilberg did not use any of the works published by CŻKH when he wrote his monumental *The Destruction of the European Jews*, although Philip Friedman had been part of Hilberg's dissertation defence committee. See Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, Chicago 1996, p. 70, 109. In the early 1980s the first overview of Holocaust historiography to include a chapter on the Commission's work was Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge, MA 1981, pp. 125–146.

Historiographic Traditions

Friedman and his colleagues had a clear notion that they had embarked on the difficult task of researching an unprecedented event in Jewish and indeed in human history. This, they believed, required the creative use of a great variety of research methods and approaches, such as gathering perpetrator documents along with different kinds of victim sources, whether testimonies and other autobiographical writing or literary creations. Commission workers did not, however, invent their entire repertoire of research and publication techniques; instead, they intentionally built upon a number of pre-war Jewish historiographic traditions, practices and imaginations that had emerged and coexisted in both scholarly and popular settings. For one, CŻKH co-workers saw themselves as heirs of what Jonathan Frankel termed the "east European school of Jewish historiography."[33] Initiated by Simon Dubnow, it essentially understood the Jewish past as national history and envisioned historiography as a collective and national endeavour. In the Dubnowian conception that the Commission workers had internalized, historical consciousness and knowledge of the past—rather than religious traditions and ancestry—constituted the primary factor in the Jews' continued existence both in times of calm and prosperity as well as in times of crisis and persecution. Dubnow's approach to studying the Jewish past—outlined in his influential 1891/1892 essay "Let us Search and Research"—not only focused on the social, cultural, and economic history of the Jewish community but also enlisted participation by broader segments of Jewish society, whether as *zamlers*, researchers or consumers of historical scholarship.[34]

Secondly, the Commission consciously drew on Polish-Jewish historiography as it developed in the interwar years. Kermisz, Blumental and Eisenbach in particular, during their academic training at Warsaw University, had been shaped by the emphasis on social and economic issues of the renowned Polish-Jewish historians Meier Bałaban, Mojżesz Schorr and Ignacy Schiper. Affiliates of the Historical Commission in Łodz had also participated in the Young Historians Circle, a leftwing-Zionist research group at Warsaw University, led by Emanuel Ringelblum and Raphael Mahler in the interwar years. Further formative influences came from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Founded in 1925 in Berlin but headquartered in Vilna, it studied Jewish society in past and present, using such social science-oriented research methods as interviews, questionnaires, statistics and autobiographical essays, while also studying cultural practices through philology and folklore. Assisted by non-professional *zamlers*, YIVO harboured a popular concept of research 'by the people' and 'for the people'; indeed its proponents saw studying social, economic, and cultural issues as a means to strengthen Jewish society from within and buttress its standing from without.

[33] Jonathan Frankel, 'Assimilation and the Jews in nineteenth-century Europe: towards a new historiography?', in Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, New York 1992, pp. 1–37, here p. 18.

[34] Simon Dubnow, 'Nahpesa ve-nahkora: Kol kore et ha-nevonim ba-'am ha-mitnadvim le'esof homer le-binyan toldot bene Israel be-polin ve-rusiya', in *Ha-Pardes*, vol. 1 (1892), pp. 221–242.

Several survivors active in the Historical Commission, above all Friedman, Trunk, Kermisz and Eisenbach, had been affiliated with the Institute and immediately after the war they re-established close contact with YIVO's headquarters in New York.[35]

Lastly, Friedman and his co-workers drew from earlier examples of Jewish documentation projects that—beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing into the Holocaust—had emerged in response to persistent anti-Jewish violence. As a form of 'popular self-defence', these initiatives engaged in what Friedman termed *khurbn-forshung* (destruction research),[36] gathering evidence from the instigators and perpetrators of violence as well as using eyewitness testimony from Jews. These models included Chaim Nachman Bialik's testimony collection on the 1903 Kishinev pogrom; Leo Motzkin's inquiry into the pogroms in the Russian Empire between 1881 and 1905; S. Ansky's initiative during the First World War to document the suffering of the Jewish populations in the Pale of Settlement amidst the devastation wrought by the Russian army and the forces of the German/Austro-Hungarian alliance; Elias Tcherikower's Berlin-based *Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv*, which documented the Ukrainian pogroms between 1917 and 1921; and most recently Emanuel Ringelblum's Oyneg Shabbes archive, some of whose remnants former co-workers Auerbach and Wasser helped retrieve from the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto in September 1946.[37] Each of these projects placed particular emphasis on the experiences and agency of victims, using eyewitness accounts and other kinds of autobiographical writing as well as gathering incriminating evidence from the perpetrators of mass violence. After the war, the CŻKH reinvented, refined, systematised and professionalised these methods in order to do justice to the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust by producing a multifaceted and nuanced record of its complexity, geographical scope and local variations.

Although the CŻKH activists began their documentation work in the belief that by writing the history of the cataclysm of Polish Jews they would contribute to rebuilding Jewish life in Poland, they met continuing antisemitic violence—which took the lives of 600–1,500 Jews in the first two years after the liberation—and mounting political pressure from the new communist regime. Sooner or later, most of the commission activists concluded that Poland held no future for Jews and joined the approximately 175,000 Jews who left Poland between 1945 and 1951.[38]

[35] On Jewish historiography in interwar Poland, see Natalia Aleksiun, *Ammunition in the Struggle for National Rights: Jewish Historians in Poland between the Two World Wars* (Ph.D. thesis, New York University 2010); on YIVO, see Cecile Kuznitz, *The Origins of Yiddish Scholarship and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research* (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University 2000).

[36] Philip Friedman, 'Die grundsätzlichen Probleme unserer Churbnforschung', ACDJC, box 13, p. 1.

[37] For more on these models and influences, see Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, chap. 1. On Emanuel Ringelblum's Oyneg Shabes archives, see Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archives*, Bloomington 2007.

[38] David Engel cautiously estimates 500–600 Jewish victims of antisemitic violence in Poland between 1944 and 1946; Jan Gross cites 1,500 for the same period, while Joanna Michlic speaks of 2,000. See David Engel, 'Patterns of anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 26 (1998), pp. 43–85; Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, New York

While the Soviet-sponsored government had initially lent its moral and financial support to the Jewish community, once communist rule was firmly in place, it curtailed the number and autonomy of Jewish institutions, closing most of them down in 1948 and 1949. In early October 1947, the Historical Commission disbanded on government orders and was superseded by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. While the replacement of the temporary commission with a permanent institution initially signalled a positive development, it ultimately brought Holocaust research under state control.[39]

SPREADING THE SEEDS: POLISH SURVIVOR HISTORIANS BEYOND POLAND

Those who left Poland continued their research and established additional historical commissions in their places of temporary settlement, thus encouraging large numbers of survivors to record their traumatic experiences and rendering Jewish Holocaust research a trans-national phenomenon. Wherever they migrated, the former CŻKH affiliates disseminated the project they had begun in Poland: writing the history of the Holocaust as a narrative in which the Jews were the main actors, drawing from a great variety of historical sources from both the perpetrators of genocide and their victims.

In spring 1946 Nella Rost, formerly the vice-director of CŻKH's Krakow branch, opened a historical commission in Stockholm, where, following the model of the commission in Poland, she collected testimonies from Polish-Jewish refugees with the financial support of the World Jewish Congress; at the end of the year, the teacher Mejlech Bakalczuk founded a historical commission in Linz, in the U.S. Zone of Allied-occupied Austria, which was soon taken over by the Galician-born architect Simon Wiesenthal, who focused on collecting evidence against National-Socialist war criminals; and in spring 1947, Joseph Wulf and Michał Borwicz established a centre for the history of Polish Jews in Paris.[40]

The most significant satellite commission was the Central Historical Commission (Tsentrale historishe komisye, TsHK), established on November 28, 1945, in Munich. No longer the spiritual home of the NSDAP, the city had become part of the U.S. Zone of Allied-occupied Germany, which provided a

2006, p. 35; Joanna Michlic, 'Anti-Jewish violence in Poland, 1918–1939 and 1945–1947', in *Polin*, vol. 13 (2000), pp. 34–61, here p. 39. On the numbers of Jewish emigration from Poland between 1945 and 1951, see Engel, 'Poland', pp. 1407–1408.

[39] On the history of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, see Stephan Stach, 'Geschichtsschreibung und politische Vereinnahmungen: Das Jüdische Historische Institut in Warschau, 1947–1968' in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, vol. 7 (2008), pp. 401–431.

[40] On these initiatives, see Nella Rost, 'La Commission Historique de Stockholm', in CDJC, *Juifs*, pp. 57–58; and Simon Wiesenthal, 'L'importance de la documentation historique juive pour la recherche et le châtiment des criminels de guerre (exemple autricien)', in *ibid.*, pp. 37–40. See also Michał Borwicz, 'Les Activités du Centre d'Etudes pour l'Histoire des Juifs Polonais' Archives of the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation in Amsterdam, file 566, 'World War II in the West', 1950.

temporary home for some 250,000 so-called Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs).[41] The Commission's founders were the accountant Moshe Yosef Feigenbaum, who—after surviving the war in hiding in Poland—had worked for the Commission in Łodz, and the Lithuanian-born journalist and history teacher Israel Kaplan, who had been liberated by American troops in Bavaria while on a death march to Tyrol.[42] Shmuel Glube, another Commission co-founder and its future archivist, was a bookkeeper and librarian who, like Feigenbaum, had briefly worked for the CŻKH.[43] Other former CŻKH affiliates joined the Munich Commission's ranks in the following weeks: Menachem Marek Asz, a founding member of the Lublin Commission; Betti Ajzenstajn, who in 1946 had edited a volume of sources on Jewish resistance in ghettos and camps for the Commission in Łodz; and twenty-one year-old Leon Weliczker, who in the same year, assisted by Rachel Auerbach, had published an account of his survival of both the Janowska camp in Lvov and a special commando which exhumed and cremated thousands of bodies in eastern Galicia as part of the so-called *Aktion 1005* in 1943.[44] Philip Friedman, who left Poland for the U.S. Zone of Germany in summer 1946 to head the AJDC's Education and Culture Department, provided constructive criticism and advice to Feigenbaum and Kaplan.

The Commission in Munich ultimately established some fifty branches with approximately eighty paid co-workers, spread throughout the U.S. Zone. Like its Polish counterpart, it saw its mission as preparing an archival basis for future historical research.[45] As a rebuke to the National Socialist mission to erase the traces of their genocide of European Jews, the activists hoped to create a historical foundation that would avert any falsification of the past. They harboured a profound suspicion that non-Jews—both Germans and Allied occupying forces alike—might have an interest in denying and distorting the historical truth about the Jewish fate. Yet, while the CŻKH had worked to establish a Holocaust archive in Poland, Commission workers in Munich—many of whom had escaped their former home and now saw no future in Europe—sympathised with the Zionist project of Jewish political sovereignty in Palestine. They understood their research as part of this struggle: only by establishing their own archives in an independent Jewish state could survivors ensure that Jews would have unrestricted

[41] Atina Grossmann estimates that a total of 250,000–330,000 Jewish DPs temporarily resided in Germany, Austria and Italy, with the vast majority residing in the western zones of Germany. The number of Jewish DPs in Germany peaked in summer 1947 at 184,000, of whom 157,000 were concentrated in the U.S. Zone. See Grossmann, *Jews*, pp. 131–132, 316–317 n. 11.

[42] See Niger and Shatski, *Leksikon*, vol. 7, p. 342, and vol. 8, p. 94; and Lucy Dawidowicz, *From that Place and Time: A Memoir 1938–1947*, New York 1991, pp. 304–305.

[43] Leo W. Schwarz, *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People*, New York 1949, p. 228.

[44] Betti Ajzensztajn, *Podziemny ruch oporu w ghettach i obozach: Materiały i dokumenty*, Warsaw 1946; and Leon Weliczker, *Brygada śmierci*, intro. by Rachel Auerbach, Łodz 1946. See also Leon Wells (=Leon Weliczker), *The Janowska Road*, Washington D.C. 1999, pp. 278, 311–315, 327.

[45] 'Protokol fun der grindungs-zitsung fun der historisher komisye', 28 November 1945, Yad Vashem Archives Jerusalem (hereafter YVA), M.1.P, folder 2, p. 9. See also, 'Historische Arbeit', in *Deggendorf Center Revue* (12 January 1946), p. 12.

access to the historical evidence of their tragedy, independent of the bearings of other nations.[46]

While Germany was only a temporary and involuntary way station on that road to sovereignty, it nevertheless provided Commission workers with an opportunity to compile an impressive collection of National-Socialist documents along with 2,500 testimonies and 8,000 completed questionnaires from the survivor population. The TsHK used a number of different Yiddish-language questionnaires which, like their Polish prototypes, solicited information on the legal, socioeconomic, and cultural impact of National-Socialist persecution on Jewish society, as well as on the various Jewish responses, whether self-help, cultural activities or armed resistance, again not only registering the extent of the persecution but also crediting victims as agents. Whereas in Poland the questionnaires served as guidelines for survivor testimonies, the Munich Commission designed fill-in questionnaires to be completed by the witnesses themselves or by Commission workers in their presence.

The TsHK chiefly targeted survivors of east European origin, who constituted the vast majority of Jews in Allied-occupied Germany. It used Yiddish-language questionnaires—only one of which had been translated into German by 1948—which asked about the events of 1939–1945, ignoring the experiences of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews prior to the war. Consequently, the Munich Commission operated largely in isolation from the 15,000–30,000 German Jews who had survived in Germany or re-migrated to their previous homeland. Rather than asking German-Jewish survivors about their experiences, the TsHK designed a separate German-language questionnaire to be completed by German mayors and district administrators in the U.S. zone. Rather than asking about their own activities during the National-Socialist era, it collected information on the fate of the Jewish populations in German towns and regions between 1933 and 1945.[47] Cultural stereotypes on the part of the commission's leaders, language barriers, and the social distance between the Jewish DPs and German Jews account for the lack of interaction between the TsHK and the German-Jewish public.[48]

The Central Historical Commission in Munich also published a Yiddish-language historical journal *Fun Letstn Khurbn*, which appeared in ten issues between 1946 and 1948, with the financial support of the AJDC. With a circulation of up to 7,000 copies, the journal addressed a Yiddish-reading audience in Germany and beyond. It featured eyewitness testimonies from women and men, and had a special series of child survivor accounts. Further, it published studies on the fate of Jewish populations in particular towns, camps, and regions; annotated German documents; and popular Jewish literature from ghettos and camps in German-occupied eastern Europe. While the periodical was well received among a

[46] Moshe Yosef Feigenbaum, 'Tsu vos historishe komisyes?', in *Fun Letstn Khurbn*, vol. 1 (August 1946), p. 2.
[47] See YVA, M.1.Q, M.1.L, M.1.PF for the collected questionnaires.
[48] 'Barikhtn tetikeyt,' in *Fun Letstn Khurbn* vol. 10 (December 1948), pp. 163–169. See also Michael Brenner, 'East European and German Jews in Postwar Germany, 1945–1950,' in Y. Michal Bodemann (ed.), *Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Germany*, Ann Arbor 1996, pp. 49–63.

Yiddish-reading audience in Germany, Europe, Palestine/Israel and the Americas, it did not attract a German-Jewish readership.[49]

The commission activists regarded it as a "duty of honour to use the waiting time in Germany for the work of eternalising the Jewish holiness and heroism during the latest destruction."[50] None of them, however, planned to stay in Germany. Most planned to relocate in Palestine—or rather in the emerging Jewish state—where they would devote their energies to building a central Holocaust archive and research institution.[51] Once the DP phase in Germany had ended, they would begin the systematic analysis of the material they had collected. As Israel Kaplan observed, "history might be made sitting on suitcases in corridors, but it cannot be written [there]".[52] The Commission in Munich closed its doors after three years, in January 1949, shipping its archival collection to Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial-in-the-making.[53]

In the years following the founding of the State of Israel and the American DP Acts of 1948 and 1950, those who had continued their research in Munich, Linz, Stockholm and Paris, along with those who decided to leave Poland a few years later, moved on to places of permanent settlement. Philip Friedman and his wife, Ada Eber, left Europe for the United States in 1948. With the help of Salo W. Baron, he became a lecturer in Jewish history at Columbia University and head of the Jewish Teachers' Institute, while also being affiliated with the YIVO Institute in New York. In addition to continuing his research and publication activities in this new setting, Friedman introduced a new Holocaust historiography to the American scholarly landscape, one that reflected the experiences of victims and, with the help of both Jewish sources and National-Socialist records, highlighted the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of persecution. Among the wealth of topics that Friedman covered in his research were such sensitive issues as the Jewish leadership and Jewish collaboration with the National-Socialists in ghettos and camps; Jewish resistance; German church opposition against National-Socialism; the timing and decision-making of the National-Socialist "Final Solution" in Poland; and the fate of the National-Socialists other victims, for example of both Sinti and Roma and Slavs.[54] Together with the international lawyer Jacob

[49] *Fun Letstn Khurbn /From the Last Extermination: Journal for the History of the Jewish People during the Nazi Regime*, vols. 1–10 (1946–1948).

[50] 'Vendung num. 1', 12 May 1948, YVA, M.1.P. folder 6, p. 25, Yiddish.

[51] Conference report, 11–12 May 1947, YVA, M.1.P., folder 38, pp. 2–3, Yiddish.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 6, Yiddish.

[53] See Moshe Yosef Feigenbaum, 'Pe'ulatah shel ha-va'adah ha-historit ha-mirkazit be-minkhen', in *Dapim le-heker ha-sho'ah ve-ha-mered*, vol. 1 (1951), pp. 107–110, 107–108. Resolutions of the Third Congress of the She'erit Hapletah in the American Zone of Germany, Bad Reichenhall, 30 March–2 April 1948, YVA, M.1.B, folder 7b. 'Khronik', in *Fun letstn khurbn*, vol. 9 (September 1948), p. 107.

[54] Philip Friedman, 'American Jewish Research and Literature on the Jewish Catastrophe of 1939–1945' in *Jewish Social Studies* (hereafter *JSS*), vol. 13 (1951), pp. 235–250; *idem*, 'Holocaust Research and Literature in America' in *Dappim le-heker ha-shoah ve-ha-mered*, vol. 1 (1951), pp. 51–68; *idem*, 'Polish Jewish Historiography Between the Two Wars (1918–1939)' in *JSS*, vol. 9, no. 4 (October 1949), pp. 373–408; *idem*, 'Preliminary and methodological problems of the research on the Jewish catastrophe in the Nazi period', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 2 (1958), pp. 95–131; *idem*, 'Problems of Research on the Jewish Catastrophe', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 3 (1959), pp. 25–39; *idem*, 'Research and Literature on

Robinson and the writer Josef Gar, Friedman also compiled two pioneering and comprehensive bibliographies of general and Jewish works on the Holocaust.[55] Friedman's untimely death in 1960 prevented him from finishing his important work. The YIVO Institute in New York also provided a scholarly home for other former affiliates of the Commission in Poland, most notably Isaiah Trunk, who after a three-year stay in Israel reached the United States in 1954, and Genia Silkes who arrived two years later.[56]

Not all of the commission workers who immigrated to Israel managed to continue their work under the auspices of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority, which opened its doors in 1954. Feigenbaum and Kaplan, for example, failed to find employment there, mainly because they lacked the formal academic credentials required by Yad Vashem's first director, the historian Benzion Dinur, who sought to establish Holocaust research as an academic discipline. While Dinur sufficiently valued their documentation efforts to let those materials become the core of the Yad Vashem archives, he would only hire individuals with certified academic training in history, regardless of whether they might instead have first-hand knowledge of the relevant historical events. Kermisz, Blumental and Auerbach, who arrived in Israel in 1950, did join the Yad Vashem staff: Kermisz as the director of the Yad Vashem archives; Blumental as the editor of *Yediot Yad Vashem*; and Auerbach as the head of Yad Vashem's testimony department.[57] In this capacity, Auerbach continued interviewing survivors in accordance with the standards she had helped develop with her CŻKH co-workers in Poland. She also played a seminal role in choosing close to one hundred survivors who testified as prosecution witnesses in the trial against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. Auerbach herself

the Recent Jewish Catastrophe', in *JSS*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1950), pp. 17–26; *idem*, 'The European Jewish Research on the Recent Jewish Catastrophe in 1939–1945', in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 28 (1949), pp. 179–211. All his articles are published in *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, ed. by Ada June Friedman, Philadelphia 1980. He also published two monographs in the United States. See *idem*, *Martyrs and Fighters: The Epic of the Warsaw Ghetto*, New York 1954; and *idem*, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, New York 1957.

[55] Philip Friedman and Jacob Robinson (eds.), *Guide to Research in Jewish History 1933–1945: Its Background and Aftermath*, New York 1958; Friedman and Robinson, *Guide to Jewish History Under Nazi Impact*; Friedman and Joseph Gar (eds.), *Bibliography of Yiddish Books on the Catastrophe and Heroism*, New York 1962; and Friedman (ed.), *Bibliografyah shel ha-sefarim ha-ivriyim 'al ha-Shoah ve-'al ha-gevurah*, Jerusalem 1960.

[56] A member of the YIVO board of directors, chairman of the Research and Planning Commission and chief archivist, Trunk's magnum opus was *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation*, New York 1972.

[57] Kermisz also edited and published part of the Ringelblum materials. See Joseph Kermish, *et al.* (eds.), *To Live and to Die with Honor! Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives "O.S."*, Jerusalem 1986. As Boaz Cohen has shown, the position of survivors in Yad Vashem was highly contested until the late 1950s. Credit for improving the situation is owed largely to protests by these three individuals and the support they received from landsmanshaftn and other survivor organisations in Israel. See Boaz Cohen, *Ha-dorot ha-ba'im—eykha yed'u? Leydato ve-hitpathuto shel heker ha-sho'ah ha-yisraeli*, Yad Vashem 2010; *idem*, 'Rachel Auerbach, Vad Vashem, and Israeli History' in Finder, pp. 197–221; *idem*, 'Setting the Agenda for Holocaust Research: Discord at Yad Vashem in the 1950s', in Bankier and Michman, pp. 255–292; *idem*, 'The Birth Pangs of Holocaust Research in Israel' in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 33 (2005), pp. 203–243.

took the witness stand in addition to Leon Weliczker (now Wells) and Ada Lichtman, a founding member of the Historical Commission in Lublin.[58]

Other activists remained in or returned to Europe. After leaving Poland for Palestine in 1947, Noe Grüss moved to Paris in 1952, to teach and as head of the Hebrew and Yiddish section of the National Library. In 1952 Joseph Wulf and Michał Borwicz closed their documentation centre in Paris; Borwicz remained in France, earning a doctorate in sociology from the Sorbonne and working as an independent scholar of Polish-Jewish history under German occupation, while Wulf settled in West Berlin.[59] As German historian Nicolas Berg has shown, in isolation Wulf adhered to a writing of Holocaust history from the victims' perspective, using both victim and perpetrator sources. He was shunned by German historians, among them Martin Broszat, who regarded him as an amateur and denied that a survivor could write "objectively" about the Holocaust.[60] After jointly publishing three important volumes on National-Socialist Germany and the Holocaust together with Léon Poliakov, as well as other works, Wulf committed suicide in 1974.[61]

CONCLUSION

For the founders and researchers of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, the persecution experience provided the impetus to pursue historical research on the Holocaust, even for those who had no training in the historical profession. They led the way by compiling Holocaust archives of perpetrator and victim sources and promulgating historiographic approaches that did not reduce Jews to being objects of persecution and extermination, but treated them as historical agents in their own right. "We cannot rest content with a study of the persecutions and the reactions they provoked", Philip Friedman contended in 1957. In fact, he saw ample need for "a history of the Jewish people during the period of

[58] See Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust*, New Haven 2001, pp. 97–182; Deborah E. Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial*, New York 2011; and Hannah Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, New York 2004.

[59] Michel [sic] Borwicz, *Écrits des condamnés à mort sous l'occupation allemande (1939–1945): étude sociologique*, Paris 1954 and *idem*, ed., *L'insurrection du ghetto de Varsovie*, Paris 1966.

[60] Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung*, Göttingen 2003 (an abridged English-language translation of this study is forthcoming: *idem*, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians: Research and Memory*, ed. and transl. by Joel Golb, Madison 2013); Nicolas Berg, 'Ein Aussenseiter der Holocaustforschung: Joseph Wulf (1912–1974) im Historikerdiskurs der Bundesrepublik', in *Leipziger Beiträge für jüdische Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. 1 (2003), pp. 311–346; *idem*, 'Joseph Wulf: A Forgotten Outsider Among Holocaust Scholars', in Bankier and Michman, pp. 167–206; *idem*, *The Invention of "Functionalism": Josef Wulf, Martin Broszat, and the Institute for Contemporary History (Munich) in the 1960s*, Jerusalem 2003. See also Klaus Kempter, 'Josef Wulf: Ein Churban-Historiker', in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, vol. 10 (2011), pp. 407–433; *idem*, *Joseph Wulf: Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts, 18), Leipzig 2012.

[61] Léon Poliakov and Joseph Wulf (eds.), *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden: Dokumente und Aufsätze*, Berlin 1955; *Das Dritte Reich und seine Diener: Dokumente*, Berlin 1956; *Das Dritte Reich und seine Denker: Dokumente*, Berlin 1959.

Nazi rule in which the central role is to be played by the Jewish people, not only as tragic victims but as bearers of a communal existence with all the manifold and numerous aspects involved". Friedman thus advocated a "Judeo-centric" rather than a "Nazi-centric" historiography.[62]

Hence the Jewish documentation initiatives in Poland and beyond did not study the Holocaust in the context of German or European history, but located it primarily in the field of Jewish history. Aware that the ideology, method, geographical scope, and number of victims of the National-Socialist "Final Solution" had exceeded all previous instances of anti-Jewish mass violence, broader trajectories and the *longue durée* of the Jewish past nevertheless served as a frame of reference for studying the dramatic changes in the demographic, social and communal structure of Jewish society, in its cultural and religious practices, and in Jewish-Gentile relations that the German murder campaign had brought upon European Jewry. Survivors' use of terms such as "latest destruction" (*der letster khurbn*) and "destruction of the third temple" (*hurban beit shlishi*) is evidence that previous catastrophes provided a foil for understanding the Holocaust. In conceiving the Jewish cataclysm as an integral part of Jewish history, the commission activists contested the historiographical imaginations of later historians who were not survivors themselves. According to David Engel, historians in Europe, North America and Israel treated Holocaust studies and Jewish history as two separate fields for several decades, not realizing that softening those strict disciplinary boundaries could only yield a better understanding of both the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and modern Jewish history beyond National Socialism.[63]

The survivors who dedicated their postwar lives to Holocaust research conceptualized victimhood and witnessing in proactive terms; testifying and documenting their ordeals moved them beyond inert suffering and, even if retroactively, provided a tool for coping with the experience of powerlessness and loss. At the same time, activists believed that their endeavours had a precautionary quality in that the knowledge and understanding of the distinct nature and unprecedented scale of the atrocities of the Holocaust might help prevent its recurrence.

Although the emigration of most commission workers temporarily spread their research initiatives beyond Poland, by the mid-1950s most Jewish documentation initiatives in Europe had either dissolved or become permanent research institutes. Consequently, the work remained primarily in the hands of a small group of full-time researchers, while the rank-and-file commission workers pursued other breadwinning obligations. Although the Commission in Łodz supplied the Polish delegation at the Nuremberg trials with documents, gave expert testimony at several Polish war crimes trials and participated in government-sponsored

[62] Philip, 'Problems of Research on the Holocaust: An Overview', in Friedman, *The Roads to Extinction*, p. 561.
[63] David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust*, Stanford 2010.

investigations at the sites of former death camps, the survivors who dedicated themselves to documenting the catastrophe received only modest recognition beyond their own circles.

Their efforts also found little resonance among professional historians at the time. Even Salo W. Baron and Lucy S. Dawidowicz, who generally supported the idea of Holocaust documentation and acknowledged the scholarly potential of some of the researchers, Friedman in particular, nevertheless expressed scepticism as to whether the time was ripe to begin historical analysis of the catastrophe.[64] Others, including Benzion Dinur in Israel and Martin Broszat in Germany, although for different reasons, took issue with the largely amateur workforce of many of the Jewish documentation initiatives and maintained a strict separation between history and memory.

The commissions' marginality can also be attributed to the fact that the survivor historians, generally working in extra-academic settings, did not educate a second generation of scholars who could have continued their teachings. Moreover, their methods and approaches were anathema to those that came to dominate the academic study of the Holocaust. For decades after the publication of Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961, academic Holocaust historiography in Europe and North America focused its analysis on the structures and policies of the National-Socialist regime while largely barring the memories and experiences of victims from the historiographical record. Using a 'top down' approach, it cited official German documents to study the fate of the Jews from the perspective of the regime's centre of power. By contrast, the historical commissions had written Holocaust history from the 'bottom up', focusing on the experiences of Jews at the periphery of the Third Reich and using both perpetrator documentation and victim testimony. This reliance on the regime's central figures and institutions was in large measure a consequence of the series of Nuremberg trials of war criminals held between 1945 and 1949. Not only had these trials by their very nature focused on National-Socialist perpetrators, but the prosecution had amassed major collections of official documents—in some cases with the help of survivor historians—in order to make their cases against the defendants, as well as to understand the connections between the regime's ideology and power structures and the deaths of millions of human beings.[65]

It is nonetheless striking that, for so long, academic historians cultivated a suspicion of memory and the accounts of contemporaries and studied the Holocaust almost entirely without the voices of its victims, either directly or through the research and scholarship generated by survivors working in non-academic settings in the early post war years. Only in the last decade of the twentieth century did historians begin to write scholarly accounts of the National-Socialist mass murder

[64] See, for example, Salo W. Baron, 'Opening Remarks' in *JSS*, vol. 12 (1950), pp. 13–16; Baron's foreword to Friedman and Robinson, *Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact*, pp. xix–xx; and Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, pp. 129–130.

[65] See, for example, Michael R. Marrus, 'The Holocaust at Nuremberg', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 26 (1998), pp. 5–41.

of European Jews that considered both perpetrator and victim perspectives, describing both National-Socialist policies 'from above' and Jewish experiences and responses 'from below'. This turn was prepared by a broader trend within the history profession in the 1970s and 1980s towards social history, micro-history and *Alltagsgeschichte* and the use of oral histories—which blurred the boundaries between history and memory—and further precipitated in 1987 by a historiographic debate between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer over the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Broszat had sparked the controversy by juxtaposing the "mythical memory" of the victims against "rational" German historical scholarship. Carried out in an exchange of letters between the two historians, the debate pitted victims' sources against perpetrators' sources.[66] In his monumental *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, whose first volume came out in 1997, Friedländer introduced what he termed an "integrated framework" that wove together the perspective of the perpetrators, the attitudes of the surrounding societies, and the experiences of the Jews to create a comprehensive narrative of the Holocaust. For Friedländer, the anti-Jewish policies implemented from the top could not be understood without the words of victims on the ground.[67] This approach has since resonated with many historians, even leading some former proponents of perpetrator history to include victim testimony in their historical studies.[68] Some scholars have nevertheless criticized the focus of Friedländer's narrative on the mindsets and deeds of the perpetrators, with Jewish records only appearing as a complement in the form of individual voices commenting on the actions of the perpetrators rather than being studied in their own right, in order to construe the Jewish experience of the Holocaust.[69]

Although some historians have begun to make use of the testimony collections compiled by survivors in the late 1940s, thus offering a belated acknowledgement of their endeavours, most of the thousands of testimonies and questionnaires lie idle in the archives, still awaiting use by scholars from various disciplines.[70] The

[66] The letters were published as 'Martin Broszat/Saul Friedländer: A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 19 (1988), pp. 1–47.

[67] Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939*, vol. 1, New York 1997, pp. 1–2; and *idem*, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination, 1939–1945*, vol. 2, New York 2007, p. xv. See also *idem*, *Den Holocaust beschreiben: Auf dem Weg zu einer integrierten Geschichte*, Göttingen 2007, pp. 7–27. Other historians have used the same methodology without calling their narratives "integrated"; see for example Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, New York 1998; and Renée Poznanski, *Les Juifs en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Paris 1997.

[68] See, for example, Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, New York 2010; and *idem*, Richard S. Hollander, and Nechama Tec (eds.), *Every Day Lasts a Year: A Jewish Family's Correspondence from Poland*, New York 2007; Omer Bartov, 'Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, 1941–44', in *idem* and Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (eds.), *Shatterzone of Empires: Identity and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, Bloomington–Indianapolis, in press.

[69] See, for example, Amos Goldberg, "The Victim's Voice and Melodramatic Aesthetics in History", *History and Theory* 48 (October 2009), 220–237, here pp. 222, 227.

[70] For example, Jan T. Gross discovered the now notorious but previously unknown murder of Jews by their non-Jewish neighbours in the Polish town of Jedwabne while reading testimony from a CŻKH collection. The events in question provided the basis for his controversial *Neighbors* (Princeton, 2001).

survivors who researched the history of the Jewish cataclysm during the transitional period following World War II attempted not only to comprehend unprecedented loss and destruction, but also to endow their postwar lives with meaning and fulfil what they deemed their moral responsibilities to the past and the future. In doing so, they demonstrated remarkable prescience in identifying which materials would prove relevant and which questions should be raised in writing the history of the Holocaust.

See the interview with Gross on Princeton University's website, http://www.princeton.edu/history/people/display.person.xml?netid=jtgross&interview=yes (14-08-2012).